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Opposition to Government Efforts to Improve the Standard of Living: The Effects of Tea Party Discourse on the Religious

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OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE STANDARD OF LIVING: THE EFFECTS OF TEA PARTY DISCOURSE ON THE RELIGIOUS

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Social scientists tracking income inequality trends in the United States have found consistent increases in inequality since 1970 (for review see Kopczuk, Saez, and Song 2010). The comparative gains in income equality following World War II have not only been erased but levels of inequality have now surpassed those of the Great Depression (Kopczuk, Saez, and Song 2010). Yet, social programs designed to aid the poor have come under constant scrutiny from right-wing political groups. The 2008 election of President Barack Obama brought to the fore the issue of economic redistribution and the subsequent vocal opposition to policies designed to aid homeowners in bad mortgages and attempts to pass a universal healthcare law seemed to illustrate and amplify a growing divide in the American electorate (Abramowitz 2010). The contention surrounding these policies largely emerged from a new political movement known as the Tea Party and focused on delineating deserving recipients of social welfare programs from those deemed undeserving (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). However, while Tea Party narratives were widely circulated in conservative media, it remains to be seen to what degree the Tea Party influenced Americans' views on social welfare policies in general and which segments of the population have been most influenced. Specifically, the present study explores changes in views on government efforts to improve the standard of living across religious affiliations in the U.S.

The religiosity of Americans' has been a defining characteristic throughout the nation's history. Into the twenty-first century, religion has remained a shaping force in the political and civic spheres of American society. A recent study by the Pew Research Center estimated some 81.5 percent of registered voters identify themselves as religious[1] (2012). To state the obvious, how religious individuals vote has significant effects on political outcomes in the United States.

[1] This percentage does not include independent or third party registered voters, however, considering their small proportion of all registered voters, their inclusion would not significantly affect the overall percentage of registered voters who identify themselves as religious.

However, research shows religious groups are not necessarily alike in their social views or socioeconomic status. For example, sectarian and fundamentalist groups are significantly more likely to oppose gay rights than more mainline protestant groups, Catholics, and Jews (Sherkat, Powell-Williams, Maddox, and de Vries 2011). Furthermore, sectarian Protestants have significantly lower levels of educational attainment, resulting in lower occupational attainment and lower incomes than other religious groups (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Sherkat 2012; Smith and Faris 2005). This suggests that religious groups in the United States may have markedly different economic interests as well as social views and may be more or less susceptible to discourses about welfare programs and their recipients. The degree to which religious ideologies differ in challenging or supporting social orders may prove important for understanding the impact of religious belief in an unequal society. Thus, the present research seeks to contribute to the body of literature by testing for religious group differences in opposition to government efforts to improve living standards. Furthermore, I distinguish between views before and after the 2008 presidential election to explore the possibility of a Tea Party effect on opinions.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Views of Inequality

Scholars researching beliefs about the causes of social and economic inequality have generally categorized perceptions into three permeable categories. First and most pervasive is the view that economic success or failure stems directly from individual effort, as American society generally provides equal opportunity to all citizens (Kluegel and Smith 1986). This individualistic view of the determinants of prosperity, termed the "dominant ideology" by Huber and Form (1973), contrasts conceptually with a structural orientation which "locate[s] the causes of poverty in the social and economic system (e.g., lack of jobs, discrimination) in which poor persons live" (Hunt 2002:812). Finally, Feagin (1975) identified fatalistic views, which attribute success to factors of chance. However, fatalistic views appear to be the least prevalent among Americans (Feagin 1975; Kluegel and Smith 1986).

While the bulk of research has demonstrated the prevalence of individualistic views, there is some reason to suggest structural understandings of inequality are gaining ground. Kluegel and Smith (1986) pointed to rising "social liberalism" in conjunction with increasingly liberal views on several social issues as well as recent economic turmoil (Hunt 1996). However, the increased salience of structural explanations of inequality has not necessarily disposed the dominant ideology nor have structural explanations been uniformly adopted across sociodemographic groups. Rather, structural understandings are seen as "layered onto" individualistic views and have been demonstrated to be more affected by group identities and circumstantial factors, such as personal experience (Hunt 1996; Hunt 2002; Kluegel and Smith 1986).

The hegemonic status of individualism and the differential impact of structural views across groups are evidenced by Kluegel and Smith's (1986) finding that while sociodemographic characteristics had little effect on the prevalence of the dominant ideology, structural explanations of poverty varied systematically across these same characteristics. Thus, Kluegel and Smith suggest, "individualism is culturally based and structuralism is more often a product of individual life experiences and conditions" (1986:101). Those sociodemographic factors which Kluegel and Smith (1986) found to be most impactful on structural views were largely related to social status, including sex, education, income, and race. Yet, while these status indicators affected the views of whites, they were not as explanatory of black social views (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Resulting from this identification of significant differences in inequality explanations across racial categories, more recent research has incorporated race as inextricably linked to views of inequality; as both predictive of views and as tied to Americans' perceptions of who is poor and why they are so (Edgell and Tranby 2007; Taylor and Merino 2011b).

Race and Inequality

The economic disadvantage of racial minorities in America has been well documented and thus, these groups seem the most likely to have life experiences which make salient structural inhibitors to economic success. Indeed, research has shown the distinction between black and white explanations of poverty lay with the degree to which structural understandings are layered on. While African Americans hold similar levels of individualism to whites, they are significantly more likely to include structural explanations of poverty (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Matthew Hunt's (1996) study of southern Californians generally replicates this finding while also adding that both blacks and Latino's scored higher than whites on a scale measuring the

prevalence of individualism. More recently, M. Taylor and Merino (2011b) again found whites to be less inclined than blacks to view poverty as resulting from structural factors.

In addition to research suggesting race functions as a predictor of stratification explanations, scholars have suggested Americans' ideas surrounding inequality are cognitively linked with racial views. As Bonilla-Silva points out, "racial considerations shade almost everything in America. Blacks and dark-skinned racial minorities lag well behind whites in virtually every area of social life…" (2010:1-2). And while the overt racism of the Jim Crow era may be fading out, discriminatory views of racial minorities persist in subtle ways as, "whites rationalize minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks' imputed cultural limitations" (Bonilla-Silva 2010:2). Thus, racial minorities are largely seen by whites as causing their own disadvantaged status and thus undeserving of targeted government action. Bonilla-Silva's notion of color-blind racism, which ignores structural impediments and focuses instead on individual explanations, is empirically supported by Hunt's 2007 study which found white explanations of black poverty were increasingly "person-centered." White respondents in Hunt's study were also less likely than black respondents to attribute economic differences to racial discrimination (2007).

A Tea Party Effect?

Following the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, a new (or renewed) brand of political conservatism espousing opposition to certain federal social programs emerged. Although organized under an array of similar monikers, the Tea Party movement's platform seemed to set aside the social moralism of the Moral Majority in favor of an economic moralism. That is, Tea Party activists sought to draw distinctions between citizens who deservingly receive social welfare benefits and undeserving 'moochers' (Ashbee 2011; Williamson, Skocpol, and

Coggin 2011). Not coincidentally, programs deemed to help the deserving, such as Medicare and Social Security, tend to benefit Americans who look like Tea Partiers; white and over fifty years old (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). Conversely, Tea Party narratives demonized programs benefiting the undeserving poor, who were perceived as non-workers and freeloaders (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). Specifically, Williamson and colleagues claim that from this line of reasoning, "government spending is seen as corrupted by creating benefits for people who do not contribute, who take handouts at the expense of hard-working Americans" (2011:33). Intertwined with understanding the undeserving as noncontributory, racial undertones pervade Tea Party discourse, as Christopher Parker's survey revealed 73 percent of Tea Party supporters agree that "Blacks would be as well off as Whites if they just tried harder" (2010). Abramowitz (2010) argues exit polls from the 2008 presidential election demonstrate white Republicans are moving further towards the right. In addition, the subsequent emergence of the Tea Party created a platform for anti-structuralists to openly criticize the Obama administration for programs aiding individuals the activists perceived to be undeserving of tax-payer money (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). Thus, the possibility of a Tea Party effect on overall opinions of government efforts to improve the standard of living warrants attention here as the movement largely based its' platform on reducing spending on programs which provide significant benefits for minority populations.

Religion and Inequality

A particular line of inquiry within the sociology of religion, especially since the rise of industrialization, has sought to understand how religious belief influences views of inequality. Scholars have pointed to religious group differences as well as the impact of Biblical literalism. Scholars who have sought to distinguish differences between affiliations have largely focused on

the views of white conservative Protestants (Edgell and Tranby 2007; Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink 1999), while some have included more nuanced analyses of Protestants and minority religious traditions (Hunt 2002; Taylor and Merino 2011b). Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink (1999) found that white conservative Protestants are less likely than other Americans to attribute racial inequality to discrimination. This finding was not replicated by Edgell and Tranby (2007), who found that white conservative Protestants did not statistically differ from other Protestants in measures of white privilege, structural explanations of poverty, or views of black cultural values. Matthew Hunt (2002) found a hierarchy of individualism among religious affiliations, with Catholics being the most likely to hold the dominant ideology, followed by Protestants then minority religious traditions. However, Hunt also found that Protestants are significantly less likely to incorporate structualist beliefs when compared to Catholics and the minority religious traditions. In contrast, M. Taylor and Merino (2011b) found no significant difference in individualistic or structuralist interpretations between white conservative Protestants and other religious ideologies.

It should also be noted that scholars have pointed to differences in the views of self-identified fundamentalists versus denominationally defined conservative Protestants (Taylor and Merino 2011a). M. Taylor and Merino found that General Social Survey respondents who self-identified as conservative Protestants were significantly more likely to align with the racist individualism described above, however, when using denominational indicators of conservative Protestantism high levels of individualism were less attributable to religion than sociodemographic indicators (2011a).

Redress of Inequality

As the literature reviewed above demonstrates, explanations of inequality generally (and especially among whites) tend to be individualistic and conceptions of what the poor look like often have racial connotations. Given these two elements of inequality views, how do Americans view policies which intend to ameliorate or at least lessen inequality? In their study using the 1990 wave of the General Social Survey, Bobo and Kluegel (1993) found significant differences in white Americans' views on inequality reducing policies depending on whether these policies were perceived to be directed towards income inequalities or targeting racial differences. Specifically, respondents living in the South and respondents in the middle class, while supportive of income directed policies, opposed policies which targeted racial minorities (Bobo and Kluegel 1993).

Adding religious affiliation into the mix, Edgell and Tranby (2007) focused on practices specified as helping African Americans' economic standing. They again found respondents in the South to be more opposed than other regions to race-targeting governmental policies. Regarding the view that blacks should get special economic assistance from the government, conservative Protestants were significantly more opposed to racially focused economic aid compared to non-conservative Protestants (Edgell and Tranby 2007). Similarly, M. Taylor and Merino (2011b) found white conservative Protestants to be the most opposed to Affirmative Action and race-targeted government spending, and the most likely to deny a governmental obligation to help African Americans, compared to other religious groups.

Finally, Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink's (1999) in-depth interviews of conservative and mainline Protestants provide perhaps the best insight into the relationship between religious beliefs and views of why poverty exists and what should be done about it. They suggest that conservative Protestantism provides adherents with a world-view which emphasizes freewill and

individual responsibility. Even when respondents acknowledged structural or historical factors inhibiting African American success, the ultimate explanation of economic success was seen as individual effort and subsequently governmental efforts to redress inequality were seen as inappropriate (Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink 1999). Indeed, over a hundred years after Max Weber penned his now classic work, the Protestant ethic appears alive and well among white conservative Protestants (2008).

A majority of the literature has acknowledged racial differences across religious groups and Protestantism among whites has seemed to be unconducive to structural understandings of the causes of and solutions for inequality. In his study of Pentecostal Christians, Schafer points out that religious groups possess distinct religious praxes which provide meaning and an interpretive frame (2009). He asserts that scholars of religion should consider, "[f]or which social status does a given set of religious convictions provide these actors the most plausible explanations and suggest the most reasonable options for action" (2009: 534). Therefore, it becomes imperative for researchers to "… grasp the complicated interplay between a society's differential demands for religious meaning and the meanings that various groups offer" (2009: 540). Thus, this study attempts to take another step towards parsing out differential frames which shape believers' perceptions of the appropriate response to relative deprivation by exploring the possibility of Tea Party narratives impacting the views of the religious in the U.S.

It is important to note that Tea Partiers and conservative Protestants are not synonymous. Indeed, the Tea Party chose to deemphasize core social views of the religious right in abortion and gay marriage (although the Tea Party certainly cannot be accused of being pro-life or pro-gay rights, either) (Ashbee 2011). What is important to understand is that both groups hold not only sociodemographic similarities, but also break from larger trends in the U.S. population.

That is, while the country is increasingly non-white and has taken a markedly liberal political turn, conservative Protestants and Tea Party supporters appear to be moving in opposite directions (Abramowitz 2010). Abramowitz notes that in the 2008 presidential election, John McCain (who has often been the focus of the ire of the religious right) actually fared better than self-proclaimed evangelical George W. Bush in areas with significant proportions of Southern Baptists (2010). While holding a shrinking share of the American electorate, groups with anti-structuralist foundations have managed to make themselves overrepresented in the political discourse, as evidenced by Tea Party candidates unseating Republican incumbents in the 2010 mid-term elections and the 50 (unsuccessful) congressional votes to repeal some or all of the Affordable Care Act (Ashbee 2011; Easley 2014). Therefore, it has become necessary to take into account the possibility of an anti-structuralism effect resulting from recent and boisterous rejections of governmental efforts to aid society's most marginalized populations.

CHAPTER 2

DATA AND MEASURES

Data for the study was collected from the 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012 waves of the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS, conducted since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center, is a nationally representative study intended to gauge social opinions and track social change within the United States. The 2006 wave contained 4510 respondents, the 2008 wave held 2023 respondents while the 2010 and 2012 waves conducted surveys of 2044 and 1974 respondents, respectively. Combined, the four waves have a sample size of 10,551 respondents, however, after removing cases for missing values the final sample size totaled 1,828. The dependent variable and a key independent variable measuring respondents' views about the determinants of success were asked on different interview schedules, leading to few respondents with responses for both variables and all statistical analyses were performed using a listwise sample therefore all analyses have sample sizes of 1,828 respondents.

Measures

The dependent variable is a survey question on a five point scale with a response of one indicating 'the government should improve living standards' and a response of five indicating 'people should help themselves.' I include bivariate analyses of opposition to the government improving the standard of living in 2006 and 2008 versus 2010 and 2012 using means of opposition. These analyses explore the possibility of a "post-Obama" and "post-Tea Party" shift by race and across religious affiliation, views of the Bible, and political identification. It should be noted that while the presidential election took place in October 2008 and Obama was selected as the Democratic candidate in June of that year, GSS surveys are generally conducted in the spring, thus GSS respondents in 2008 are not expected to be influenced by discourse which

happened later in the calendar year. For the purposes of these analyses, the dependent variable was dichotomized representing responses coded 1 through 3 as (0) support for government improving the standard of living, and responses coded 4 or 5 as (1) opposition to government intervention, or individual responsibility for economic status. The recoding was biased towards government intervention in that the middle option, indicating both government and individual responsibility, was coded with support for government action.

The key independent variable measures respondents' religious affiliation by combining GSS questions asking for religious and denominational affiliation. Due to the highly varied nature of religious affiliation in the United States, religious groups were initially reduced to twelve more manageable categories: Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, fundamentalist denominations, Mormon, Quaker and Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, Other (including Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and other Eastern Religions), and lastly, unaffiliated.

Religious identification grouping presented significant conceptual challenges, as has been noted in the literature (Smith 1990). The initial twelve category variable noted above does not provide sufficient counts for each group, nor are the denominations distinct enough to stand alone for the purposes of this project. Thus, in line with previous literature, the twelve categories were reduced to the following six categories: Non-affiliated (no religious identification), liberal Protestant (Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Lutheran), moderate Protestant (Methodist, Quaker, and Orthodox Christian), sectarian Protestant (Southern Baptist, Mormon, and other fundamentalist denominations), Catholic, and non-Christian, which represents minority religious traditions (Sherkat 2011). These classifications vary slightly from previous literature in that this classification scheme divides the common mainline Protestant category into liberal and moderate Protestants. It should be noted that this study cannot asses the views of specific minority

religious traditions, such as Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist, as these distinct groups are lumped together due to insufficient counts for each group.

In addition to measures of religious affiliation, I include an independent variable which gauges respondents' feelings about the inerrancy of the Bible with three possible responses: 'the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word,' 'the Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word,' and 'the Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.' The Biblical literalism variable remained in the original format, with the option for 'don't know' made a missing value.

Political views were measured on a seven point scale ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative while political identification ranged from strong Democrat to strong Republican. Political views as used in this project remained true to the original survey question's seven categories. The political identification indicator was dichotomized to represent Republican identification.

The control for views regarding the causes of economic success is a three point scale with options of hard work, luck or help, and both. Control variables for sex, race, age, education, income, region, and survey year were included in the regression models. Sex was dichotomized to represent female while race indicators included white, black, Latino, and other. Additionally, a dummy variable was included for the South. Finally, age, education, and income were left in their original format and dichotomous variables representing each year of the survey were included.

For the regression analysis I use ordinal regression (Spss20, PLUM). In addition to a baseline model, I include subsequent models introducing controls for religious affiliation,

Biblical literalism and political ideology. Regression coefficients are presented as odds ratios, which are calculated by exponentiation of regression coefficients

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the sample population which produced a mean of 2.87 (*SD*=1.17) for the dependent variable, suggesting the sample was generally in favor of the government improving living standards. A dichotomized version of the dependent variable demonstrates 25% of respondents opposed government efforts to improve the standard of living, suggesting instead that people should help themselves. Respondents were distributed fairly evenly among the religious categories, with 16% of the sample claiming no religious affiliation, 10% liberal Protestant, 18% moderate Protestant, 25% sectarian Protestant and Mormon, 26% identifying as Catholic, and just 4% identifying with minority religious traditions. The mean response for political views was 4.7 (*SD*=1.44), suggesting the average respondent held moderate political views. Fewer than 35% of the sample identified politically with the Republican party. A near-majority of respondents (49%) claimed the Bible is the inspired word of God, but should not be taken literally, while 31% said the Bible should be taken literally, word for word, and 20% claimed the Bible is a book of fables. Demographically, 55% of the sample was female, and 64% of the sample identified as white, 16% as black, 11% as Latino, and 8% as a different ethnicity. The average respondent was around 47 years old (*SD*= 17.03) with an income of $48,132.94 (*SD*= 40,656.30), and some college education (mean of 13.59 years, *SD*=3.0).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of GSS Sample (n=1828)

Category	Mean/%	S.D.
Dependent Variable	2.87	1.17
Religious Identification		
Unaffiliated	16%	
Liberal Protestant	10%	
Moderate Protestant	18%	
Sectarian Prot.	25%	
Catholic	26%	
Non-Christian	4%	
Views of Bible		
Divine Word of God	31%	
Inspired Word	49%	
Book of Fables	20%	
Controls		
Luck or Help	30%	
Hard Work	70%	
Political Views	4.07	1.44
Republican	35%	
Sex (Female)	55%	
White	64%	
Black	16%	
Latino	11%	
Other Race/Ethnicity	8%	
Age	47	17.09
Education	13.59	3.0
Income	$48,132.94	40,656.30
South	38%	
2006	34%	
2008	24%	
2010	21%	
2012	21%	

*Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

In Table 2, I present bivariate measures of opposition to the government improving the standard of living in 2006 and 2008 versus 2010 and 2012, presented as percent opposed with confidence intervals. First, I focus on a potential shift among religious affiliations by race. Opposition to government efforts remained constant at 25 percent opposed before and after 2008, suggesting anti-structuralist rhetoric did little to change how Americans as a whole perceive the role of government in improving living standards. However, among whites, opposition to structural efforts is stratified by religious affiliation. Furthermore, the analysis reveals a

Table 2. Percent Opposed to Government Improving the Standard of Living by Religious Identification and Biblical Beliefs (n=1828)

	White	Black	Latino	Other
Religious Identification				
Unaffiliated	28 [20-36] 28 [18-36]	10 [0-24] 5 [0-15]	8 [0-24] 0	14 [0-35] 8 [0-24]
Non-Christians	5 [0-15] 19 [1-37]	25 [0-100] 50 [0-100]	- -	0 0
Catholic	32 [26-39] 27 [19-36]	33 [0-88] 0	19 [10-29] 25 [14-37]	29 [5-54] 0
Liberal Protestant	36 [26-45] 34 [22-45]	33 [0-100] -	0 40 [0-100]	17 [0-60] 33 [0-100]
Moderate Protestant	28 [20-36] 28 [19-37]	11 [0-21] 14 [2-26]	0 25 [0-64]	9 [0-29] 40 [3-77]
Sectarian Protestant	28 [21-36] 41 [31-52]	9 [3-15] 7 [1-14]	16 [0-34] 22 [0-56]	33 [13-54] 38 [11-64]
Biblical Beliefs				
Biblical literalist	30 [23-38] 42 [33-52]	11 [4-17] 9 [2-15]	18 [8-28] 19 [5-34]	32 [11-53] 35 [10-61]
Bible inspired by God	31 [26-35] 29 [24-35]	10 [1-19] 9 [0-18]	10 [0-19] 28 [13-43]	21 [18-34] 12 [0-25]
Bible is a book of fables	26 [19-33] 25 [17-33]	16 [0-34] 10 [0-33]	20 [1-39] 24 [1-46]	7 [0-21] 13 [0-28]
Total (2006 and 2008) **Total (2010 and 2012)**	**25 [22-27]** **25 [22-28]**			

Bracketed percentages are 95% confidence intervals

reordering of this hierarchy following the 2008 elections. In 2006 and 2008, liberal Protestants were most opposed to government intervention improving the standard of living at 36 percent, followed by Catholics (32%). Still among whites, the unaffiliated, moderate Protestants, and

sectarian Protestants each opposed government intervention at a rate of 28 percent, while among those aligning with a minority religious tradition, only five percent opposed government efforts. However, following 2008, the views of sectarian Protestants took a dramatic swing towards oppositional views of government efforts to improve the standard of living, jumping from 28 percent in 2006 and 2008 to 41 percent in 2010 and 2012. In contrast, liberal Protestants were slightly less opposed in 2010 and 2012, dropping to 34 percent opposed to government efforts. The unaffiliated and moderate Protestants remained at 28 percent opposed to government efforts, while Catholics dropped to 27 percent opposed to government efforts. Non-Christian groups increased in opposition from five percent to 19 percent, but still remained below the national average of 25 percent. Thus, while as a whole, white respondents' opposition to governmental efforts has diminished or remained the same over time, sectarian Protestants appear to have conservatized following the 2008 election of President Obama and the subsequent Tea Party uprising. It is also interesting that Smith and Faris (2005) found sectarians to have the lowest income levels among Protestants, and so while government aid may benefit many sectarian Protestants, they have become the most opposed to these policies.

The results found regarding religious affiliation are mirrored when considering beliefs about the Bible. White respondents who view the Bible as the inspired word of God, but do not take it literally, word for word, dropped slightly in opposition, from 31 percent to 29 percent after 2008. Similarly, whites who take the Bible as a book of fables barely changed opinions, with 26 percent opposing government efforts before the election and 25 percent opposing after. In contrast, 30 percent of white Biblical literalists opposed government efforts in 2006 and 2008 yet this figure jumped to 42 percent after 2008. This analysis also highlights the racial divide surrounding opposition to governmental aid to the poor. In 2006 and 2008, among black

respondents who take the Bible literally, only 11 percent opposed government efforts and this figure dropped to nine percent after 2008. Therefore, while black and white respondents may each claim to take the Bible word for word, there is a stark divide in how they view the government's role in improving the lives of Americans. Again, white sectarians appear to be the only group moving significantly in the direction of anti-structuralism.

Table 3. Percent Opposed to Government Improving the Standard of Living by Political Identification (n=1828)

	White	Black	Latino	Other
Strong Democrat	12 [5-19]	9 [2-16]	25 [0-54]	0
	16 [6-25]	7 [1-14]	18 [0-45]	0
Weak or Leaning Democrat	19 [13-25]	13 [4-22]	11 [2-20]	19 [1-37]
	21 [15-28]	9 [0-18]	23 [7-38]	9 [0-21]
Independent	24 [16-32]	14 [0-29]	8 [0-16]	20 [1-39]
	11 [4-19]	8 [0-24]	17 [6-33]	0
Weak or Leaning Republican	37 [31-44]	14 [0-49]	38 [15-61]	23 [0-50]
	43 [34-51]	13 [0-42]	29 [5-54]	43 [13-73]
Strong Republican	50 [41-59]	0	0	60 [23-97]
	66 [54-78]	33 [0-100]	75 [0-100]	50 [5-95]
Total (2006 and 2008)	**25 [22-27]**			
Total (2010 and 2012)	**25 [22-28]**			

Bracketed percentages are 95% confidence intervals

Next, I considered changes in views after the 2008 election across political identification, presented on Table 3. The percentage of opposed among white respondents in 2006 and 2008 increased linearly from strong Democrat (12% opposed), to Independent (24% opposed), to strong Republican (50% opposed). After 2008, there was a small increase in opposition among white Democrats (4% increase among strong Democrats and a 2% increase among weak or leaning Democrats). White Independents became substantially less inclined to oppose government efforts, dropping 13 percentage points to 11 percent opposed. White Republicans, on the other hand, saw their levels of opposition increase after Obama's election, from 37 percent to 43 percent among weak or leaning Republicans and from 50 percent to 66 percent among those

identifying as strong Republicans. Considering after 2008 only 25 percent of American's viewed governmental efforts to improve living standards negatively, that 66 percent of strong Republicans would take this view illustrates the degree to which white Republicans' views of welfare policy differ from the rest of the country. Furthermore, that following the election of Obama and the emergence of Tea Party discourse there was a 16 percent increase in strong Republicans' opposition suggests the Republican party has reacted unfavorably to Obama's

Table 4. Ordinal Logistic Regression of Opposition to the Government Improving the Standard of Living (n=1,828)

	Baseline	Religious Affiliation	Biblical Literalism	Political Ideology
Controls				
Female	.89	.87	.85†	.91
Black	.40***	.35***	.34***	.50***
Latino	.66**	.67*	.66**	.79
Other	.64**	.69*	.69*	.74†
South	1.01	1.00	.98	.94
Age	1.01*	1.01†	1.01†	1.01†
Education	1.01	1.02	1.02	1.03†
Income	1.00***	1.00***	1.00***	1.00***
2006	.79†	.78*	.77*	.75*
2008	.85	.84	.85	.89
2010	.88	.87	.89	.90
Religious Affiliation				
Unaffiliated		.66**	.80	1.14
Non-Christian		.39***	.46**	.73
Catholic		.71**	.75*	.86
Liberal Prot.		.76†	.80	.90
Moderate Prot.		.75*	.76*	.84
Biblical Literalism				
Fables			.65**	.84
Inspired Word			.89	1.04
Political Ideology				
Republican				1.95***
Political Views				1.27***
Determinants of Success				.83***
-2 log likelihood	$X^2(11)=166.27$, p<.001	$X^2(16)=186.38$, p<.001	$X^2(18)=195.13$, p<.001	$X^2(21)=340.30$, p<.001

†=.10, *=.05, **=.01, ***=.001

Categories withheld for comparison: Religious Affiliation= Sectarian Protestant, Race= White, Year=2012, Biblical Literalism= Divine (infallible) word of God.

redistributive platform. Meanwhile, the views of black respondents (who largely identify as Democrat or Independent) saw a slight drop in already low levels of opposition after the 2008 election across each political identification.

The final multivariate analyses were performed using ordinal regression modeling and are presented on Table 4. Turning first to the baseline model, the -2 log likelihood for the model produced a significantly better fit than an intercept only model ($X^2(11)=166.27$, $p<.001$). Racial characteristics produced significant coefficients with black respondents having 60 percent lower odds of being opposed to government efforts to improve the standard of living than white respondents, controlling for other factors in the model. Latino respondents had 34 percent lower odds of being opposed to government intervention than white respondents. Increases in age were associated with being more opposed to government aid with a one year increase in age prediction one percent higher odds of being more opposed to government efforts to improve the standard of living. Increases in income were also associated with higher levels of opposition to the government while respondents in 2006 held 21 percent lower odds of opposition than respondents in 2012, controlling for other factors in the model.

The second model introduces religious affiliation variables and also produced a significantly better fit than an intercept only model ($X^2(16)=186.38$, $p<.001$). Focusing on the religious affiliation coefficients, Table 4 shows being religiously unaffiliated decreased the odds of having a more oppositional stance towards government efforts to improve the standard of living by 34 percent compared to sectarian Protestants, while being a member of a minority religious tradition (non-Christian) decreased odds by 61 percent compared to sectarians, controlling for all other factors in the model. Likewise, sectarian Protestants held 1.29 times

higher odds of increased individualism than Catholics and 1.25 times higher odds than moderate Protestants.

Among control variables, race held the strongest impact on opposition to government efforts. Compared to white respondents, black respondents had 65 percent lower odds of having more unfavorable views of the government improving living standards, while Latinos had 33 percent lower odds and all other races had 31 percent lower odds. Rises in income levels were positively and significantly related to increases in opposition to government efforts. Finally, respondents in the 2006 GSS survey had 22 percent lower odds of more individualistic opinions compared to respondents in 2012. As Table 4 shows, respondents in 2008 were not significantly different from those in 2012. However, referring back to Tables 2 and 3, this is not surprising given that overall opposition has remained relatively stable, while individualistic views have become more pervasive among sectarian Protestants and Republicans.

The third model introduces a variable measuring the degree to which respondents take the Bible literally. The -2 log likelihood for the model produced a significantly better fit than an intercept only model ($X^2(18)=195.13$, $p<.001$). Results show that respondents viewing the Bible as a book of fables held 35 percent lower odds of more negative reactions to government efforts, compared to Biblical literalists and controlling for all other variables in the model. Across religious affiliation, non-Christians had 54 percent lower odds of opposition than sectarian Protestants. Additionally, sectarian Protestants were 1.25 times more likely than Catholics and 1.24 times more likely than moderate Protestants to be more opposed to the government improving the standard of living. Regarding control variables, the introduction of Biblical views resulted in little change across racial categories. Compared to white respondents, blacks had 66 percent lower odds, Latinos had 33 percent lower odds, and other racial groups had 31 percent

lower odds of taking a more individualistic stance towards redresses of inequality. Income was again positively related to increases in opposition to government efforts and respondents in 2006 again had lower odds (23%) of being more opposed than respondents in 2012.

The fourth and final regression model introduces three new variables: a dummy indicator of alignment with the Republican party, a seven category political views indicator ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative, and an indicator of respondents' perceptions of the determinants of success. The -2 log likelihood for the model again produced a significantly better fit than an intercept only model ($X^2(21)=340.30$, $p<.001$). Each of the political ideology measures proved to be strong indicators of how respondents views government efforts to improve the standard of living. Alignment with the Republican party generated 95 percent higher odds of more unfavorable views of government intervention compared to non-Republicans, controlling for all other factors in the model. Additionally, a one unit increase in conservatism resulted in 27 percent higher odds of more oppositional views towards government intervention. Regarding views of whether success is determined by hard work, luck or help, or both (with both being coded as the middle option), a one unit move away from individualistic explanations (hard work) resulted in 17 percent lower odds of being more opposed to the government improving the standard of living.

As Table 4 shows, political ideology proved to be a mitigating factor for the effects of religious affiliation and Biblical literalism as these coefficients were rendered non-significant. Black respondents held 50 percent lower odds than whites of more unfavorable views of government aid, while Latino and other identifiers were no longer significantly different from whites. Increases in income were again positively associated with more unfavorable views of

government efforts to improve the standard of living and respondents in the 2006 sample held 25 percent lower odds of more negative views than respondents in 2012.

Several key findings emerged from this research. First, the degree to which Americans view the government as playing a role in improving citizens' lives varies by collective life experiences, of which race seems to be extremely impactful. Of course, it would be incorrect to assume all members of a given race have experienced the same advantages or constraints, however, as Kluegel and Smith suggest, individual sociodemographic factors have little effect on the pro-structural views of African Americans and other racial minorities (1986). The regression analyses presented here give credence to that idea, as blacks were consistently and significantly less opposed to government intervention than white respondents, controlling for sociodemographic factors and even individualistic views of what determines economic success (Table 4).

Furthermore, as there can be little doubt that Americans recognize the fact that racial minorities tend to occupy the lowest rungs of the economic ladder, white Americans (and especially those who are most conservative) appear less willing to attribute the economic status of non-whites to social structures. As Tables 2 and 3 illustrate, racial comparisons *within* religious groups, views of the Bible, and political identification reveal white respondents are more opposed to government aid than similarly oriented racial minority groups. For example, white Catholics opposed government aid more than Latino Catholics and white sectarian Protestants and Biblical literalists held dramatically more individualistic views than blacks and Latinos in those same groups.

Considering model three on Table 4 controls for individualistic views regarding the determinants of success and whites were still held 50 percent higher odds of being more opposed

to government intervention than blacks, whites seem more likely to reject the idea that economic stratification warrants structural solutions and instead feel that people should help themselves. Thus, it seems white Americans do not (or refuse not to) recognize the multitude of structural advantages whiteness provides and instead view success as being solely the product of a superior work ethic. Perhaps it was this notion that lead attendees of the 2012 Republican National Convention to respond to President Obama's perceived redistributive platform by chanting, "We built it!" (Elving 2012). While the dependent variable in this study was not presented in specifically race focused way, the notion that "Blacks would be as well off as Whites if they just tried harder" may very well be at play here (Parker 2010).

A second key finding centers on the increased opposition among white conservatives and sectarians to the government improving the standard of living after the 2008 presidential election and the subsequent emergence of the Tea Party. As Tables 2 and 3 show, white sectarian Protestants increased in opposition by 13 percent, white Biblical literalists increased in opposition by 12 percent, and white respondents strongly identifying with the Republican party increased in opposition by 16 percent after 2008. These results give further credence to analyses suggesting a bifurcation in political and social views between white conservatives and the rest of the nation (Abramowitz 2010; Ashbee 2011). While regression analyses presented here (Table 4) show that respondents in 2012 had 25 percent higher odds of being more opposed to government intervention than those in 2006, that 75 percent of the overall sample approved of government aid before and after 2008, it seems that anti-structrualist narratives are falling on deaf ears outside of the most conservative (white) Americans. Yet, individualism seems to not only be a staple of conservative and sectarian ideologies, but also increasing in prevalence in conservative discourse. That conservative and sectarians' individualistic world views seem to be hardening,

coupled with their decreasing political market share, there is little wonder that Republicans have taken up a strategy of obstruction surrounding the Affordable Care Act, as evidenced by 50 unsuccessful attempts to weaken or repeal the law (Abramowitz 2010; Easley 2014).

Additionally, it seems that Tea Party narratives regarding the lack work ethic among certain welfare recipients were particularly conducive to the interpretive frames of sectarian Protestants (Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink 1999; Schafer 2009; Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). Emerson and colleagues (1999) argue that white conservative Protestants possess cultural tools which emphasize, "accountable freewill individualism" and "anti-structuralism." They go on to suggest that, "…it is the type of individualism and the ferocity with which it is held that distinguishes white conservative Protestants from others" (Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink 1999). Thus, the Tea Party appears to have emphasized a staunch individualism which held water or perhaps even reinvigorated an already held interpretive frame among sectarian Protestants. However, the present study cannot assess the degree to which these views were translated into political capital in the form of votes. It seems unlikely that the political convenience the Tea Party may have offered sectarian Protestants translated into more or new votes for conservative candidates as sectarian Protestants were likely voting for conservative candidates anyways. What seems more probable is that the emergence of the Tea Party served to reinforce and amplify the individualism of conservative Christians in the political sphere.

Finally, the higher than average levels of opposition to the government improving the standard of living among liberal Protestants warrants some attention (Table 2). Considering that mainline Protestants tend to be more in line with the rest of the country regarding many social views, for example gay marriage (Sherkat, Powell-Williams, Maddox, and de Vries 2011), that liberal Protestants were nine percent more opposed to government intervention than the national

average after 2008 may be surprising. Smith and Faris (2005) found these groups to have higher than average incomes and regression analyses presented here (Table 4) found increases in income to be associated with more individualistic views. Yet, when controlling for sociodemographic factors, including income, none of the regression models predicted odds of opposition among liberal Protestants to be significantly different from their sectarian counterparts, while moderate Protestants held lower odds of opposition than sectarians prior to controls for political ideology. The literature provides little explanation for the similarity of liberal and sectarian Christians regarding views of how to diminish inequality. Future research may benefit from exploration of the interpretive frames of more liberal Protestant denominations to understand how these groups interpret their own economic affluence.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Despite widespread support for governmental efforts to diminish now historically high levels of inequality, some segments of the population have seen oppositional views towards structural inequality solutions strengthen. Prior to the election of Barack Obama, sectarian and fundamentalist Protestants held views similar to the rest of the population. However, the election of a president who advocated inequality reduction led to white conservatives organizing and articulating a different, more individualistic outlook. The present study demonstrates that the views proclaimed by the Tea Party resonated with and influenced sectarian and fundamentalist Protestants far more than any other religious group.

Sectarian religious affiliation in America has generally been conceived in social science literature as having conservatizing effects for believers, especially in regards to the formation of opinions of the government's role in providing a certain standard of living for the population. Thus, the interpretive frames emphasizing the importance of work may have made sectarian groups particularly receptive to Tea Party discourses. The findings here substantiate that notion, as sectarians dramatically increased in opposition to government efforts to improve the standard of living following President Obama's election.

In sum, the present study reinforces previous literature suggesting conservative Protestants strongly identify with individualistic frames and these frames translate into oppositional views of government activity geared towards reducing inequality. Racial undertones also loom large in the findings, as white respondents are more opposed to government efforts than are racial minorities. Finally, the election of President Obama in 2008 and the emergence of the Tea Party appear to have bolstered anti-structuralist views among white conservative

Christians while the rest of the country has remained supportive of government efforts to improve the standard of living.

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